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# WWF Guide for Plastics Cleanups

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# Welcome

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## Vision

Thank you for your interest in setting up a volunteer event! Volunteering is a great way to increase engagement and activation around a company's sustainability goals and initiatives. Volunteering can provide people with an enriched sense of purpose and can improve the way people see a company's working environment [1, 2].

The goal of this toolkit is to guide and empower you to host your own volunteer cleanup event, and one that will engage employees in your company's sustainability initiatives and in caring for local communities where we live and work.

Hosting a cleanup enables you to activate employees around plastic pollution, a pressing environmental issue with widespread impact to wildlife, ecosystem health, food supplies, and livelihoods. We've grown to rely on plastic to our daily lives and our economy. Plastic production surged from 1.5 million tonnes in 1950 to 335 million tonnes in 2016 [3], and in the next 20 years, plastic production is expected to double [4]. The problem is that today, plastic waste is entering the ocean at a rate equivalent to one dump truck per minute [5].

Estimates vary substantially and are geography specific, but between 40 and 60 percent (by weight) of all plastics are designed to be used for less than two years, with most of these being designed for a usage period of less than a day [9]. At the same time, plastic pollution has long-lasting impacts.

Over 1400 marine species, including sea mammals and birds, are impacted by plastic in the ocean through ingestion, entanglement, or habitat effects [6, 7]. And it is estimated that by 2050, 99% of all seabirds will have ingested plastic [8]. Additionally, we know that larger plastic pieces can cause direct harm when ingested by wildlife through suffocation, digestive blockage, and body toxicity [5].

People and their livelihoods are also impacted by plastic pollution. Environmental damage to marine ecosystems costs billions of dollars each year [10]. Plastic that enters wildlife through ingestion or other mechanisms not only affects the animal itself, but the prey which consumes this animal [12] – which has potential impacts for human health. Additionally, the leaching of chemicals from plastic litter is a major concern [13].

In some cases, plastic is incredibly important; it keeps our medicine safe and protects our food which in turn helps prevent food waste. WWF does not call for the

## By the Numbers

- In America, we purchase over 111 billion plastic beverage bottles every year and use 500 million drinking straws every day.
- In total, Americans throw away about 34.5 million tons of plastic per year.
- In the US we recycle only 9% of the plastic we use – we can do better!

elimination of all single-use plastic. Our vision is to stop the flow of plastic pollution into our ecosystems by 2030.

WWF's **No Plastic in Nature** goal takes a “one planet” approach to address plastic pollution, accounting for the interconnectedness of the Earth’s resources and by, substituting plastic for another material, such as paper, isn’t shifting the environmental costs to another issue. The “one planet” perspective” looks at solving the plastic pollution crisis through a systems-change actions and within the context of the other environmental challenges we face, ensuring that we have food, water, and energy security for all.

This complex problem does not have a simple solution and needs the involvement of businesses, policy makers, and individuals. As an individual, you have the power to choose products with sustainable packaging, reduce your use of single-use plastics, choose reusable products, put pressure on businesses and policy makers, and volunteer in cleanups to help stop the flow of plastics into our waterways and oceans!

By organizing a cleanup and continuing to engage employees on this issue, you can be a part of the journey to **No Plastic in Nature**, WWF’s vision to stop the flow of plastic pollution into our ecosystems by 2030.

Here’s how to get started...





# Before

Thoughtful planning is critical to a successful cleanup event – so please consider the following steps while creating your own.

Before diving in, you may explore planning an event through a local non-profit. Check with your employees and local community to see if any non-profits host cleanups near you, or look into participating in [The Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup](#). Local organizations who are familiar with the area and the most urgent needs can be great partners to help with planning and logistics. Contact local non-profits to learn more about how you could work together on an event.

## Select a Date and Location

### ☐ Select a date.

- Think about what time of year would be best based on your local climate.
- Consider if you want your event to be on a weekday or weekend. Employees may be more likely to participate in an event happening during normal work hours. But, if the event is on a weekend, invite community and family members and have a picnic after the cleanup to create draw for a larger event.
- Consider planning your event around an activation day to gain more excitement.

January 5 <sup>th</sup>	National Bird Day
February 2 <sup>nd</sup>	World Wetland Day
March 3 <sup>rd</sup>	World Wildlife Day
March 22 <sup>nd</sup>	World Water Day
April 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Earth Day
May 18 <sup>th</sup>	Endangered Species Day
May 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Biological Diversity Day
May 23 <sup>rd</sup>	World Turtle Day
June 5 <sup>th</sup>	World Environment Day
June 8 <sup>th</sup>	World Oceans Day
July 13 <sup>th</sup> – 19 <sup>th</sup>	Coral Reef Awareness Week
July 16 <sup>th</sup>	World Mangrove Day
September 4 <sup>th</sup>	National Wildlife Day
Last Saturday in September	World Rivers Day
Mid-late September	<a href="#">International Coastal Cleanup</a>
October 24 <sup>th</sup>	World River Dolphin Day
November 15 <sup>th</sup>	America Recycles Day
December 4 <sup>th</sup>	World Wildlife Conservation Day

### ☐ Select a time for your event.

- This may depend on whether your event will include a picnic after the cleanup or a speaker beforehand, but a recommended time period for the cleanup portion including a welcome and safety talk is about 2-3 hours.

### ☐ Select a location.

- Pick a safe and accessible location that has enough litter for a worthwhile cleanup.
- Consider the ease of transportation to the site; locations nearby the employees' place of work are ideal.
- Consider ecological importance and fragility of the area. Are there turtles nesting on the beach? Are there fragile plants in the area? A local nature center or park may be able to help you with this information.

- ☐ Contact the owner/municipality for your site.
  - Ensure there are no other events planned that will conflict with yours.
  - Arrange for waste disposal. Confirm where you will leave the trash and recycling collected at the event. And ask for guidance on accepted recyclables. Ensure you know the recycling guidelines well enough to provide guidance to your volunteers at the event.
- ☐ Visit the location before the event.
  - Double check that the location is safe, accessible, and has litter to cleanup.
  - Check for any hazards on site.
  - Determine where you will set up a check-in station on the day of the event and where you will leave bags of trash and recyclables.

## Recruit Volunteers and Promote Your Event

- ☐ Recruit volunteers
  - Start recruiting volunteers **at least** 30 days before the event.
  - Think about the best way to communicate with employees at your organization. Do you have an intranet? Do most employees prefer to use social networks, like Facebook? Or is email the best way to reach your colleagues? Based on this, create a work event or Facebook event so volunteers can RSVP and you can communicate with them.
  - Utilize as many communication channels as possible to advertise your event: posters, social media, email, office calendars and newsletters, etc. Check out additional materials in the toolkit that provide sample emails, fillable posters, and more.
- ☐ Communicate with your volunteers
  - Communicate a meeting spot with your volunteers for the day of the event and provide suggestions on the best way to get to the site, maybe recommending the closest bus stop or the best place to park.
  - Let participants know of any accessibility concerns at the site. Are there places to sit and rest on-site? Is there especially rough terrain?
  - Don't be afraid to send your volunteers multiple reminders leading up to the event.

## WWF Involvement and Incentives

□ Encourage participants to create their own [Panda Nation](#) page. Employees can create an event page for the cleanup on our peer to peer fundraising platform in order to collect donations for WWF and increase the impact of their participation in this event.

□ Offer incentives to event participants

- Consider the budget for the event.
- If there is a budget available, consider a donation to WWF based on either participation or on pounds or bags of trash collected. For example, the company could pledge to donate \$50 to WWF for every participant that comes to the cleanup or the company could pledge \$1 to WWF for every pound of trash collected at the event. These amounts are completely scalable depending on budget but are a great way to incentivize participants and to amplify the impact of the event.

□ Add a picnic or WWF expert speaker to your event to increase participation.

- Again, consider available budget for the event.
- If budget permits, consider adding a speaker or picnic to the event.
  - You could work with WWF to bring an expert to your event to speak about pollution and our environment. If you are interested in having WWF involved in your event, please email [cheron.carlson@wwfus.org](mailto:cheron.carlson@wwfus.org).
  - You can also have a picnic at the end of your event as food is always a good incentive.
    - An additional idea for the picnic could be to have employees submit the most interesting item they found during the cleanup. Collection jars can be used for employees to donate \$1 (or as much as they'd like) to vote for their favorite item. A staff newsletter can recap the event and the #1 voted weird item, and the cash can be donated to WWF.



## Gather Supplies

The following is a list of suggested supplies you might consider obtaining in preparation for your event. Every event is unique, so make sure you are consulting with your company's safety personnel.

- ☐ Gloves, including some pairs of heavy-duty gloves for sharp items
- ☐ Bags and/or buckets, including a "sharps" container
- ☐ Water cooler filled with water and ice for volunteers
- ☐ First aid kit
- ☐ Clipboards
- ☐ Pens or pencils
- ☐ Sunscreen
- ☐ Bug spray
- ☐ Hand sanitizer
- ☐ Scale for weighing trash
- ☐ Camera or smartphone for taking photos
- ☐ Snacks for volunteers
- ☐ Trash pickers
- ☐ Flagging tape
- ☐ Signs or banners to mark your site
- ☐ Folding table for water cooler, snacks, check-in, etc.

### **Recommend Items for Volunteers to Bring:**

- ☐ Sturdy shoes or boots
- ☐ Reusable water bottle
- ☐ Additional trash bags and gloves
- ☐ Change of clothes

## Consider

- Consider having two different colors of trash bags – one color for recyclables and one color for landfill.

## Safety

Whether you are doing a river clean-up or a beach cleanup, it is critically important that you first consult with your company's safety and risk management teams. They can help you sort through issues like arranging transportation, safety protocols, and putting in place appropriate insurance. Please again note that this toolkit is provided for informational purposes only, and you may not rely on it as a comprehensive event logistics or emergency plan.

## Plan for a Zero Waste Event

- ☐ Plan for waste-free refreshments.
  - If you are providing food at your event, try to have food that doesn't require packaging such as fresh produce. Serve finger food that can be eaten without cutlery such as sandwiches, veggies, etc.
  - If you host events regularly, consider purchasing reusable plates and cutlery that you wash between events.
  - If you are ordering food for the event from a caterer, talk to the business about minimizing waste (requesting they leave plastic cutlery out of the order, etc.).
  - Additionally, if there are leftovers at the end of the event, have volunteers bring home any leftovers rather than throwing the food away.
  - Have a large container of water and encourage volunteers to bring reusable water bottles and cups, have a few extra on hand for anyone who forgets to bring their own.
- ☐ Use reusable garden gloves and have volunteers bring their own reusable gloves.
- ☐ Suggest volunteers walk, bike, use public transport, or carpool to the event.
- ☐ Plan for confusion-free trash sorting.
  - Have clearly marked locations or bags for recycling, compost, landfill, potentially hazardous materials.
  - Be aware of local recycling guidelines. Do you have a place to properly dispose of organics? What can go in? Check with the local municipality to find out what to do with potentially hazardous materials. Only send materials to landfill as a last resort.

## Other Considerations

- ☐ Tide tables: If your event is near the coast, [check the tides](#) to plan your event around the time of low tide.
- ☐ Water quality: [Check the water quality](#) of your site.



# During

Have a smooth-running and successful event!

## Set-Up

- ☐ Arrive early to set up for your event.
  - Set up your check in station with a water cooler and sunscreen and nontoxic bugspray for your volunteers. Also, set up and clearly label the sorting and trash collection area.

## Welcome Volunteers

- ☐ Once everyone has arrived, gather all volunteers to welcome them.
  - Give the volunteers a warm welcome and thank them for coming.
  - Go over safety protocols with your volunteers.
  - Include an overview on what can be recycled, and how to collect those items separately.
  - Clearly communicate which color trash bag is for recycling and which is for landfill. Also, tell volunteers where to put full bags.
  - Let volunteers know if there are any boundaries to the event site and let them know what time to meet back at the check in table.
  - Encourage volunteers to collect and report information on what they pick up – this helps fill the data gap on plastic pollution. One way volunteers can collect data is with the Ocean Conservancy's [CleanSwell](#) app. This app allows volunteers to contribute to a global database on plastic pollution.
  - Have a point person stay at the check-in station in case of health emergencies or late arrivals.
  - And lastly, tell your volunteers to have fun!
- ☐ If you chose to have a picnic aspect to your event, communicate the timeline to all volunteers.

## Have Fun and Document Your Success

- ☐ Take photos!
  - Take some action shots of your volunteers, maybe a before and after snap of your site, and don't forget to take a group photo at the end!

## Wrap-Up

- ☐ Weigh or quantify all the trash collected. Remind volunteers who chose to use the CleanSwell app to finish entering their data. Ask volunteers to share out some of their metrics.
- ☐ Thank each volunteer for coming and tell them to look out for a follow up email from you.
- ☐ If you included WWF incentivization, let your volunteers know how much money this event generated for WWF's conservation work.



# After

**After your event, congratulate yourself and your volunteers on a successful project!**



## Thank Your Volunteers

□ Send a thank you email to volunteers. You may want to include the total amount of trash collected, the funds raised, the number of volunteers, and any other fun stats. It's always interesting to recap the weirdest items found and number of specific items such as plastic straws or bags.

## Keep the Momentum

Keep the momentum going from your event! Continue to educate yourself and other employees at your organization on plastics.

In order to get to **No Plastic in Nature**, we need everyone to rethink how they're using plastic and what they're doing with it when they're done with it. While hosting plastic cleanups is critical, there are other important actions to take. When the sink is flooding, you don't start with the mop; you start by turning off the tap. Continue to the next page for 12 ways you can turn off the plastic tap in your life.



# Here are 12 ways you can turn off the plastic tap in your life:

1

**Find out which plastics your town's recycling system accepts**, and make sure you're always recycling them. Look at labels and packaging. Try to choose items packed in materials that are accepted at your local recycling center.

2

**BYO...** Choose to **"bring your own"** to replace common single-use plastics like bags, beverage cups, water bottles, straws, and utensils. Plan ahead and keep a reusable water bottle and coffee tumbler with you, have your own utensils for on-the-go meals, and carry a reusable shopping bag. Instead of using plastic wrap, sandwich bags, and disposable plastic refrigerator containers, try reusable options made of sturdy materials like stainless steel or glass.

3

**Plan a recycling seminar** at your office or in your community – invite a representative from your municipality to discuss ins and outs of recycling for your location.

4

**Patronize brands and companies that are dedicated to reducing plastic waste.** Talk to your local restaurants and stores about recycling and decreasing their single-use items like to go containers, bags, silverware, straws, etc.

5

**Advocate:** Demand action from policy makers and use your voice to create accountability. Petition your local government for better recycling capabilities, strict regulations on waste disposal, and initiatives to cut plastic use.

6

**Organize or join another cleanup.** Every piece of plastic you pick up is one less piece in nature.



7

Consider how you can **go zero waste with future events.** When you're hosting a party, instead of using plastic cups, plates, and utensils, use real tableware. If you have to use disposable items, buy compostable or recyclable ones.

8

**Purchase responsibly** and choose products that have recycled content and/or good sourcing credentials (such as Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials or Forest Stewardship Council ® certified).

9

**Donate or host a swap:** Donate unwanted plastic items such as furniture, dishware, etc., to local charities, or offer them online to your local freecycle program, instead of trashing them. It's a great feeling knowing your items are with someone who really needs them instead of lying useless in a landfill for centuries. Alternatively, organize a "fantastic plastic swap". Maybe your coworkers or friends could use your plastic items that you no longer use. Donate any leftovers to charity.

10

**Support local non-profits** that work to reduce plastic waste in our environment.

11

**Reuse creatively.** Think of out-of-the-box ways to reuse older plastic items. That plastic cup you don't want anymore might make a great pen and pencil holder—or part of an arts and crafts project for the kids! Use and reuse plastic as long as you can, then get creative and reuse it for something else!

12

**Reach out to WWF staff** to create a robust employee engagement program around this topic or other conservation topics that may interest you and other employees.

## Additional resources

- [How2Recycle](#)
- [The Recycling Partnership](#)
- [Circulate Capital](#)
- [Keep America Beautiful](#)
- [Closed Loop Partners](#)
- [The Ocean Conservancy](#)



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